

Tobacco Prevention Curriculum in Washington Schools

Recent publication by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (J Natl Cancer Ins 2000;92:1979-91) regarding the failure of a stand-alone tobacco prevention curriculum to influence tobacco use among students long-term have raised questions about what curricula *will* work in a classroom setting. The Washington State Department of Health, in partnership with the Washington Educational Service Districts (ESDs), is implementing a comprehensive school-based approach to tobacco prevention, which includes curriculum *and* other key components. The failure of the Hutchinson curriculum only demonstrates that curriculum alone is not enough to impact youth behaviors, and that environmental approaches (such as policy change, parent education, and community linkages) are essential to a successful school-based program.

The Department of Health has offered the following guidance for school personnel to select curriculum as part of their comprehensive school-based program.

Recommendations regarding content are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction” (MMWR Vol. 43;No.RR-2:1-18).

Recommendations for Curriculum Inclusion within the Comprehensive School-based Program

School-based tobacco prevention curricula should:

- Provide instruction about the short- and long-term negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills
- Provide tobacco prevention education in K-12th grade. This instruction should be especially intensive during junior high or middle school, and should be reinforced during high school.

Recommendations for Curriculum Content

Specific objectives that should be included within the lessons are:

- Students should understand that tobacco use can result in decreased stamina, stained teeth, foul-smelling breath and clothes, exacerbation of asthma, and ostracism by nonsmoking peers
- Programs should use a variety of educational techniques to decrease the social acceptability of tobacco use, highlight existing antitobacco norms, and help students understand that most adolescents do not smoke
- Programs should help students understand that some adolescents smoke because they believe it will help them be accepted by their peers, appear mature, or cope with stress. Programs should help students develop more positive means to attain such goals.
- Programs should help students develop skills in recognizing and refuting tobacco-promotion messages from the media, adults, and peers.
- Programs should help students develop refusal skills through direct instruction, modeling, rehearsal, and reinforcement, and should coach them to help others develop these skills.

- Programs should help students develop necessary assertiveness, communication, goal-setting, and problem-solving skills that mat enable them to avoid both tobacco and other health risk behaviors.

Recommendations in Planning for Curriculum Deployment

Selection of curriculum for inclusion in the school-based program implemented in any school district should involve:

- Assessment of existing tobacco prevention curriculum implementation, to identify gaps and potential efficiencies
- Evaluation of curricula with regard to cost, classroom time, and linkage to the Washington Education Learning Requirements (ELRs) which are used to measure the effectiveness of our state's education system
- Communication with teachers and other staff to identify support or potential rejection of specific curricula available for tobacco prevention
- Engagement of local teachers and other staff in the selection process for specific curricula, to minimize resistance to implementation

Examples of Curricula to Include in School-based Tobacco Prevention Program

The following curricula are suggested for ESD review by the Department of Health, in that they meet the requirements for curriculum content suggested by CDC. These curricula are also designed for delivery in grades 5-9, the target population for our Washington school-based tobacco prevention program.

- Life Skills*
- Project Toward No Tobacco Use (TNT)*
- Tobacco, Science & You
- Project ALERT
- Here's Looking at You
- Great Body Shop
- Media Literacy

*CDC identifies these programs as 'exemplary'